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**Vacation**

Going on vacation has got to be the best time you’ll have all summer. You have the chance to get away from your everyday life and venture out into the world; sometimes to places you’ve already been and sometimes to places you’ve never seen before. You get to explore the world with your family. Summer 2011 seemed to be sort of repetitive, working at K-Mart almost every day, basking in the sunshine when I got the chance and hanging out with my friends and family as much as possible. Finally, at the end of July, my family and I packed up enough of our lives into a suitcase to last us through the week. We loaded up the truck all morning and piled in with our dog, Max. He hung his head out of the window and let his tongue flap in the wind as we headed to Fairbury. Max couldn’t come with us to Oregon but he got his own little vacation out on a farm at a sort of pet hotel. We said our goodbyes and I made sure to get the owners number so I could keep track of how my precious doggy was doing while we were apart.

When we left Fairbury, we got back on the highway and headed to Chicago. The car ride was long, boring and exasperating, seeming to go on forever with my baby brother, Brody’s, restlessness and my other brothers, Hayden’s, refusal to keep quiet. Brody was satisfied for a while with his toy car keys that beeped and honked but soon he grew tired of them along with almost all of his others toys. I played peek-a-boo with him when he got fidgety and tried to keep him entertained when he seemed like he was going to have an outburst. My older sister, Jordan, slept most of the time with her earphones in and her iPod blasting, cuddled up against the window and covered with my blanket. Jimmy Buffet music streamed out of the truck speakers and my dad sang along with every note. It is crazy how much you can love your family but at the same time, you cannot stand them. After being cooped up in that truck with them for so long, I literally thought I was going to go insane. Honestly, though, it wouldn’t have been my family if they didn’t annoy me and sometimes it’s those little annoyances that really make you appreciate the good times you have.

Later in the evening we finally arrived in Chicago, greeted by the crowded traffic and bright lights of the city. Since our flight wasn’t scheduled until the following day, we went to a hotel and settled in for the night, ordering enough Chinese food to feed an army. With our bellies full, we all laid down for the night. The foreign sounds and surroundings made for a long, almost sleepless night for me. Strangers opening and closing their doors, coming and going at all hours of the night, cars along the highway driving in the distance; all of these different noises were not typical of a night spent at home in the quiet town of Danvers. In the room next door, Brody was up and crying, running a fever form teething. My stepmom Amy left around midnight on a mission to find an open drugstore for baby Tylenol and by the time she got back, Brody was fast asleep.

At the crack of dawn our alarms went off, letting us know it was time to get up and get going. After getting cleaned up we ate a quick breakfast and the hotel service drove us to Midway. After hauling all of our luggage in, getting it checked and going through security, I convinced my dad that we just had to have McDonald’s mocha frappes. We ordered four and sat in the terminal awaiting our flight. A few hours and half a great book later we landed, got our bags and stepped outside into the brisk air of mountainous Portland, Oregon. My step grandpa was waiting for us outside and we greeted one another with hugs and exclamations of how long it has been since we had seen each other. We decided to go eat lunch at a local Mexican restaurant called Salvador Molly’s. Dad and I love the show “Man vs. Food” and the host, Adam, featured this restaurant in an episode where he did a challenge of eating five habanero fritters with habanero salsa. Dad dared to do it, suffering through the intense heat of the meal and ended up getting his picture of the Hall of Flame. The rest of us were a little more timid and ordered less challenging meals that were delicious nonetheless. I do not think my dad would have attempted this challenge had he not had his family there, cheering him on. Sometimes it’s our family with whom we share our greatest adventures. We inspire one another and make sure to support them no matter what.

Now that we arrived in Oregon, you would think our traveling would be over; however, we still had a three hour drive to our final destination, Florence, Oregon, where Grandpa actually lived. The landscape was beautiful and we took the scenic route along the coast to get there, driving along the winding roads surrounded by trees, mountains and the ocean on one side. By this point, mostly everyone was cranky, but we finally arrived in Florence and went to Grandpa’s house to meet his wife’s daughter and her family for the first time. Everyone was so nice and inviting as we introduced ourselves and got to know each other throughout the night. They let us borrow one of their cars to get around in for the week and we drove to where we would be staying about ten minutes away in a nice little secluded trailer not far from the beach. Throughout the week we bonded as a family with people who were completely new to us before, warming up to them as if we had known them our whole lives. We explored the world’s largest Sea Lion Caves together, amazed at the sight of how many there were and how they interacted with one another. We went exploring on the beach, dipping our feet into the freezing cold ocean water, building sand castles and burying Hayden in the sand. Jordan and I walked along the beach until we reached a bunch of rocks and caves, adventuring in and taking lots of pictures. Everything was so beautiful and peaceful. I felt as if I was in another life; I had never felt so relaxed, content with nature and happy with my family.

The day before we left, we went crab boat fishing. Grandpa invited a bunch of people that we had met at his church to come along with us. We packed up coolers of drinks and snacks, brought on all of the equipment we would need and settled down as we started out on the water. When we finally got out far enough where we could start going faster, the water became more and more choppy. Almost everybody started to feel the side effects of motion sickness so we dropped the crab cages and headed back to shore. Right as we approached the docks, picture crazy Amy accidently dropped her camera into the ocean. It fell off her lap in the worst possible spot and slid through a hole in the side of the boat and sank down into the water before anyone really knew what had happened. We lost all of our pictures from vacation up to that point, almost 300. Amy was distraught but comforted by the fact that it wasn’t a person who fell from the boat. Later that evening we had dinner at a nice seafood restaurant on the water. We all enjoyed each other’s company during the meal and then ended up going back to our trailer to build a campfire and make S’mores. Laughter and smoke filled the air around us; the sadness we would feel tomorrow was the last thing on our mind as we sat around the campfire together. Even though we were not doing anything too significant, the memory that we were doing it together, as a family, will stay in my mind for a long time.

The next day, my family and I packed our lives into our suitcases once more and prepared for the three hour car ride back to Portland. When we got to the airport, we took as long as airport security would let us in saying goodbye to Grandpa. I waved bye as he drove away in the window-marker painted van he borrowed from his church. The same old routine was reenacted as me made our way through the airport and to our gate to wait once more for our flight. The view from the air was breathtaking as we passed over enormous mountains and looked down on their snow covered peaks. I snapped pictures with my phone when we passed over Mount Hood where my dad’s cousin lives. I finished the other half of my book on the plane and proceeded to take a nap. The flight back seemed to take twice as long as the one there (even though they were exactly the same) but I think the time change had a big influence on that. We drove home from Chicago and a little after midnight I drowsily made my way to my room, dropped my bags to the floor and sank into the familiar comfort of my own bed. Reflecting back on the last week, I realized how much I cared about my family. Despite the fact that they can drive you crazy, your family is all you really have to count on. They are there from the beginning, caring for you, sharing experiences and making memories that will last a lifetime.